

Information for K-12 Schools, Illinois

Interim Guidance for novel coronavirus (NCoV)

January 31, 2020

Background

There is an ongoing outbreak of a new virus, called 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), which began in persons living in Wuhan City, China. This virus causes a respiratory illness which includes fever, cough and shortness of breath. Illness can begin 2 to 14 days after an exposure.

Public health actions

On arrival to the United States, travelers from China may be asked questions to determine if they need to undergo health screening. During the health screening, authorities check temperatures, symptoms and ask about specific exposures in China. If travelers have concerning symptoms, they will be sent for medical evaluation. CDC staff will provide health information cards to travelers who do not have symptoms. The cards tell travelers what symptoms to look out for, and what to do if they develop symptoms within 14 days after leaving China.

Guidance for schools

K-12 schools may have exchange students or other students who attend their school and have traveled to various areas in Asia, including China. A student who has traveled overseas to Asia or specifically to areas designated by CDC as areas of risk for NCoV, and is well, is not restricted from school or any public activities.

If a student who has traveled in the last 14 days to areas designated by CDC as areas of risk for NCoV develops fever and respiratory symptoms (cough or difficulty breathing), call your local health department and they can assist with determining what additional evaluation is needed and where it should take place. At this time of the year, there are many possible causes for respiratory illness, and it is likely a medical visit for further evaluation (including laboratory testing) will be necessary.

General infection control guidance for schools is available on the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology [website](#).

The CDC site has important information about NCoV and areas they have designated as risk areas for NCoV, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> .

The Illinois Department of Public Health has information relevant specifically to Illinois. <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/>

Attached is a question and answer document about 2019-nCoV.

If your school has additional questions or concerns about 2019-nCoV or any concerns about student travelers, please contact the [local health department](#) in your area.

FAQs: Schools

What are the symptoms that 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), can cause?

Patients with 2019-nCoV have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. The 2019 novel coronavirus is concerning because it can cause lung infection (pneumonia).

How does the virus spread?

It's too soon to know where exactly 2019-nCoV came from or how easily it spreads. Some viruses are highly contagious (like measles), while other viruses are less so.

What if a student is sick with fever and respiratory symptoms?

Residents of Illinois are at low risk of becoming infected with 2019-nCoV, unless they have recently traveled to an area designated as an area of risk by CDC or have come in close contact with someone who was ill who recently traveled in that area. Even if an ill student has traveled to an area designated by CDC as an area of risk, or has had contact with an ill person who has traveled there, respiratory illness may be due to a variety of other more common causes, including influenza and other common viruses.

One of our students is an exchange student from China. Can they return home?

The [CDC's Travelers' Health webpage](#) should be consulted for current information.

What if we think a student may be infected with 2019-nCoV?

If a student has recently traveled or been exposed to someone who traveled to or from an area of risk as designated by CDC and is experiencing fever, cough or difficulty breathing, contact your local health department. Call ahead before taking the child to a doctor's office or emergency department to prevent any potential spread.

If we have a student who has been ill at school and is now a person under investigation (PUI) (please check with your local health department about this designation) what do we tell parents?

In general, continue to follow your usual procedures for notification of parents/guardians whose children are ill at school. The local health department will follow up with schools who need more specific guidance.

Should we be concerned about classroom pets or other animals and 2019-nCoV?

CDC recommends that people traveling to China avoid animals both live and dead, but there is no reason to think that any animals or pets in the United States might be a source of infection with this new coronavirus.

How can our school prevent infections with 2019-nCoV and other respiratory diseases?

There is currently no vaccine to prevent 2019-nCoV infection. However, there are vaccines to prevent other common respiratory viruses such as seasonal influenza. Additional information on vaccines can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/index.html>.

The best way to prevent infection is to take precautions to avoid exposure to the virus, which are similar to the precautions you would take to avoid the flu. IDPH always recommends everyday actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

Additional information on 2019-nCoV outbreak is frequently updated on the [CDC website](#) including the areas they are considering as areas of risk for NCoV.